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ABSTRACT

Until recently the subject of females competing against other females has been rarely considered, while most of the literature on sex-related competition written since the 1960s concerns women's competition against men. This paper reviews current literature on female versus female competition and explores: (1) cultural conditioning in relation to why women compete; (2) how women compete; (3) the competition's impact; and (4) possible solutions for reducing this type of competition. The paper concludes that women need to focus more on task orientation, collaborative communication, the identification of role-models, and shared input into decision-making. (JHP)

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**HAIR-PULLING & NAME-CALLING:
A STUDY OF FEMALE/FEMALE COMPETITION**

by

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INTRODUCTION

A survey of the literature of the women's movement since the sixties reveals one common theme: man is the enemy. Joan Weber in her introduction to Changing Women in a Changing Society (1973) stated that "the consequence is to protect a privileged position for middle-aged males by hamstringing possible competitors" (p. 2), and describes the "full force of male hostility." Pamela Butler (1981) lists things that women are "not permitted" to do; the underlying assumption is that it is men who are not permitting this. In the late 80's, the popular term is the "glass ceiling," the barrier that women hit on their way up the corporate ladder. Again, the assumption is that the glass ceiling is entirely the work of men. Johnson (1987) suggests that males use fear, "...the supereminent weapon of the patriarchy to keep women in our place" (p. 9). Having identified the enemy, participants in the war band together in separatist groups: we "build coalitions" and talk about "connecting...to confront injustices and inequities" (Call for Proposals, National Women's Studies Association, 1988 Annual Conference).

What until recently seems to have been ignored is the enemy within: how and why women compete against other women. While this may not be admitted inside separatist groups, it is very visible and finally now being acknowledged "out there" in those environments in which "the enemy"--men--are still perceived to be in control, such as management and the marketplace. The purpose of this study is to identify the historical basis and conditioning for female-female competition, identify the "usual" female ways of dealing with problems (competition), and suggests ways of using change theory and collaboration as a means of moving beyond women "doing in" other women.

GETTING IT OUT IN THE OPEN

Until recently, the subject of females competing against other females has been a relatively taboo subject: women have wanted to see themselves and project an image as the nurturers and gentle, non-competitive souls who abhorred the competitive nature of males. However, many bold writers are now surfacing the issue: David Brand, reporting in Time magazine on the rivalry and envy, reports on one author who has 300 pages of interviews which "support the hypothesis that women are attacking women in the work place with carefully veiled venom and viciousness." Madden (1987) suggests that "women fighting other women is the norm in elevated corporate positions" (p. 84), and equates the process to the shunning that the Quakers did: when someone breaks the social rules, the offender is banished, ignored as though she does not exist, which serves to "effectively raise a smoke screen of false sisterhood that blocks out the shouts of battle." Johnson (1987) reports: "All my experience in the women's movement had convinced me that the greatest barrier to our success is our hatred of ourselves and other women, our deep distrust and rejection of one another..." (p. 145). Keller and Moglen (1987) state "The fact is that women seem to experience different, deeper, and more painful forms of competition with one another than they do with their male peers" (p. 495). Eichenbaum and Orbach (1988) state that "Competition is endemic to women's relationships in every arena. One moment, girls and women compete about who is the best dressed and in the next moment they compete about who is the worst off in any given situation" (p. 117).

Brand (1988) suggested that "Many women scoff at this portrait of the female barracuda maneuvering her way around corporate reefs" (p. 67). Keller and Moglen would seem to agree: "...we were believed and believed ourselves to be, like women generally, immune to the problems of competition that seemed to characterize the male world" (p. 494), and refers to the "mythology of sisterhood that fits poorly into a world of scarce material and emotional resources..." (p. 495). Jong describes the experience: "It is unpleasant but predictable to be put down by male chauvinists, but when feminists attack....the experience is devastating" (1986, p. 119). Johnson has coined a phrase for it, "trashing women," and suggests it is an addiction: "This explains to me how the most vocally angry women, visibly rancorous and terribly intent on hurting another woman one moment, can be embracing her the next. Why shouldn't they love and embrace her? She has just been the source of an incredible fix and they are soaring" (1987, p. 56-57). Madden describes the difficulty: "Women's Rules in war games defy all sense of logic. No one admits they're playing. No one admits they've won or lost. No one is sure when they've scored. No one admits to declaring the action. So, there's no one to say knock it off" (1987, p.148).

CULTURAL CONDITIONING: WHY WOMEN COMPETE

Given that women do compete in a deadly fashion with other women, it is useful to identify why that is so. While Madden, and Eichenbaum and Orbach, in particular, suggest that this is a phenomenon surfacing because of women moving into the workplace, this paper suggests that it is part of

historical gender conditioning. Women have traditionally been taught to compete for four reasons: to catch the prize (a man), to protect men, to protect our own identity and keep other women from abandoning us, and because of perceived scarce resources. More women in the workplace has only enlarged the battleground of the competition.

We are taught early to compete for the attention and approval of men. First, it is for father's approval, and our first female competitor is mother! Then, we are encouraged to practice on brothers while waiting to be old enough to acquire the all-important boy friend. The ultimate competition is to win a husband, and the cycle starts all over as we seek to get approval and attention from our sons (which is why mothers admittedly raise sons differently than daughters!). Eichenbaum and Orbach (1988) agree: "Competition among women has historically centered on getting men's attention. Women have competed with each other to have the prettiest dress, the newest hairdo, the sweetest personality....Women saw each other as rivals in a fight for men's attention..." (p. 113). Madden (1987) states that "Men serve primarily as the catalyst--or the prize--of women's battles among themselves" (p. 54) because we were taught by our mothers to "cater to the males in one's life and engage in personal infighting with rival females, and to hide competitive instincts behind a smile" (p. 138). And we sacrifice our female friendships in this battle, by the unwritten rule that female outings are off the instant a man calls! Johnson reasons that "Every positive attribute finds its home in maleness. So we compete for the recognition and love of these demigods, their affirmation the only affirmation we value" (1987, p. 44). And virtually any newspaper's comic section adds further evidence, as in this 8 June 1988 "Doonesbury" strip:

(The phone rings.) Male: Hello?

Female voice: Hi, stranger!. It's Elaine Kovich! Remember me?

Male: Remember you? You're the only thing I do remember from sophomore year! How've you been, Elaine?

Female: Just great. Listen, I heard about J.J. and I just called to see if you were okay. (In a previous strip, wife J.J. had left this husband.)

Male: Me? Oh, yeah, I'm fine. I mean, these things happen, don't they? People change.

Female: Boy, isn't that the truth?

Male: So! Do you live here in New York?

Female: I could.

Men are the prize, but women also compete with other women to protect men. Representative incidents in this category are occasions such as women stopping other women from being first to do something, so as not to "upstage" a man who had intended to do it. Or, a woman approaching a customer contact employee with her husband behind her. Or, a woman stepping into a foray when her husband isn't doing so well. Elgin (1980) reported

It is a source of never-ending amazement to me that when I devote a day or two in my linguistic courses to verbal self-defense each and every academic term, the males in the room never open their mouths to object to anything I say. They do not have to. They lean back in their chairs and smile at me, politely, and we wait for what we know will happen; and it always does--the female students defend them. Passionately. There may, they declare, be some men such as I describe, but not their father, brother, boyfriend, husband, dentist, lawyer, mechanic, and so on. They will willingly sit and hear me say that other women attack them verbally, and they will remember incidents in which their mother or sister or female friend turned on them with one of the Octagon attacks. But they claim staunchly that men who do those things are very rare and that even those who do them don't know they are doing anything of the kind and therefore can't be criticized for it. The only exceptions will be the militant feminists in the room, who will deny that women ever do such things" (p. 282-3).

And again, evidence can be found daily in the comic strips:

Father: Let's see...pens, paper, envelopes. OK, kids. It's that time again.

Kids: Oh, no! Not that! Daddy, do we hafta write thank-you letters?

Father: Look, if people care enough to send a gift, you owe them the courtesy of a thank-you letter.

Kids: Can't we phone?

Father: A phone call isn't good enough. The proper thing to do is to acknowledge a gift in writing. It's a caring, personal touch,

Michael. People really appreciate that little extra effort it takes to send a handwritten note.

Kids: Daddy, when you write a thank-you letter, what do you say?

Father: I dunno. Your mother always does it for me. (From "For Better or For Worse," spring 1988).

Eichenbaum and Orbach see competition between women as a result of the problem of "differentiation," or how we identify ourselves: Sons are recognized early as being different from their mothers, while daughters are not. When a mother "looks at her daughter, she sees herself" (1988, p. 59). A woman's world is therefore relational, and her search for self is through connecting with others. This results in an "ethos that requires staying in the same place together or moving forward together at the same time. In other words, difference cannot be allowed and it is experienced as dangerous and threatening, and invokes feelings of abandonment....We are disrupting the known: the merged attachment....The unspoken bargain is that we must all stay the same" (p. 89).

Keller and Moglen agree that the inability to differentiate is a problem, stating that women's relationships remain "haunted by the residue of unresolved conflicts from another domain" (1987, p. 499). Relationships--so vital to women--are better if everyone abides by the same values, "stays in the same place," so to speak. And too often that same place is clinging "to their images of themselves as oppressed victims, courting us as friends by identifying with our powerlessness" (p. 498). To break ranks, to move up or feel good about someone else moving up, evokes abandonment and a loss of identity for women. It was important to stay in the "in" crowd, as stated by Eichenbaum and Orbach: "...fidelity meant keeping other girls out of the friendship or the clique or sharing a particular hatred of a teacher or type of girl" (1988, p.116). Johnson identified this same problem and likened it to cult membership, describing "passionate conformity, the incredible peer pressure

to follow the leaders blindly and to condemn any who deviated....fear of censure" (1987, p. 37-8). Lindenbaum is very specific: "female gender identity is based on a sense of continuity, connectedness, of being 'in-relationship' " (1985, p. 93). Mathison found the same in a quantitative study: women who are willing and able to "challenge a competent male (is) unlike them. With this inability to identify, subtle forms of rejection may have surfaced" (1986, p. 604).

Closely related to identity, or connectedness, as a reason for why women compete with each other is the fact that success is labelled as "unsisterly behavior." "Feminist colleagues watch her closely for the first signs of unsisterly behavior--manifest evidence that she has been corrupted by 'male' success....Achievement, instead of constituting a value, comes to be seen as a sign of a different kind of failure. As Valerie Miner has said, it seems more sisterly to struggle than to be successful" (Keller and Moglen, p. 505). Eichenbaum and Orbach suggest that women are frightened "when a woman doesn't act like a victim" (1988, p. 111). Madden related a personal experience: "To return to female favor, I spearheaded the spreading of trendy rhetoric about the acceptable enemy, 'male chauvinist pigs'--none we knew personally--who were holding us all back" (1987, p. xiii). Madden also identified the ultimate in unsisterly behavior: "Women dread the day when other women will force them to take on equal responsibility. They'll fight one another to the ground before letting that happen" (1987, p. 194).

Another reason women compete with other women is for perceived scarce resources. Keller and Moglen identify the scarce resources as "jobs, truth, or simply male approval" (1987, p. 500), and suggest that women equate one's success with another's failure (p. 510). Johnson also describes this perception: "when one of us gets some, the rest of us become very anxious

because we think that leaves less for us...we tear down and try to destroy other women whom we suspect of trying to sneak a piece" (1987, p. 52). Lindenbaum agrees: women try to get hold of someone else's qualities rather than assuming that they can develop the same thing for themselves. Women feel that other women gain something only at the expense of another person, taking something away from someone else (1985, p. 98-99). Women seem to have an "image of limited good": good things exist in limited supply.

Women, then, have traditionally been taught to compete for four reasons: to catch the prize (a man), to protect men, to protect our own identity and keep other women from abandoning us, and because of perceived scarce resources.

HOW WOMEN COMPETE

Women compete differently than men do, and differently with other women than they do with men. While men are conditioned to differentiate themselves from others, to stand out as an individual and compete in a straightforward manner, women have a far more subtle means of competing which takes two forms: a passive and supposedly compliant nature with men, and a more "knife in the back" style used with women when men are not around. Neither involves direct confrontation.

The first reason for female competition--for the approval of men and to "catch" a man--demands a very indirect means. Kent (1987) provides the most succinct guide in her "how-to" catch a man, summarizing generations of female know-how. She formulated these strategies because she could "use them to catch him" (p. xiii), including "you must understand where he is coming from so that you can lead him where you want to go" (p. 65) and how to make yourself indispensable (p. 168). She suggests that clothing is important:

"T-shirts are great. It doesn't take much male imagination to know that in less than five seconds they are off over your head....wear skirts that loosely outline the body and appear easy to raise....Skirts that button up the front are fine because they stir the imagination" (p. 23-24). Madden echoes this use of clothing as a weapon: "Business dress is the uniform of the Uncivil Business War: it enables a woman to know her enemies, and it lets them know her...Clothes provide ammunition to women on the prowl for one another's weaknesses" (1987, p. 149, 157). The popular press provides ample evidence of women's passive tactics to "catch" a man: "He now understood why Hugh did not consider Kate for a prospective wife. Her frank gaze did not distinguish between male or female. She displayed no feminine softness nor any of the tricks of adoration and helplessness with which women sought to ensnare a man" (DeBoer, 1987, p. 212). In Suzette Elgin's futuristic novel, the 25th Amendment "rolled back women's rights two hundred years and assured the supremacy of males in every aspect of life" (1984, cover), however, the women through passive means got everything they wanted without the men even knowing it! Kent (1987) puts it candidly: "Chances are that every married woman you know, especially your mother, told you a tale about how her husband got down on bended knee and romantically asked for her hand in marriage. The truth would be more interesting, but rarely will a woman admit to the wiles she used to get her man, and even more rarely will she admit that she orchestrated the proposal" (p. 178). And, of course comic strips provide ample additional evidence of this indirect approach:

Friend: Sometimes I think I should just give up dating. All the good ones are married anyway.

Sally: Do you know how many of those good married ones are products of the "sandpaper" approach?

discount the value of their own and other women's contributions, and refuse to work with and for other women.

The discomfort of women working for other women has also been well documented: Goldberg (1968) and Miller and McReynolds (1973) found that women may devalue assertive professional women more than men do. Madden reported a national poll showing that most women said they would prefer working for a man, while most men said their bosses' gender was unimportant (1987, p. 176). Sutton and Decker (1986) reported in Harvard Business Review of having repeated a study first done in 1965 about attitudes towards women bosses: in 1965 less than 40% of both men and women said they would not mind working for a woman. In 1985, almost 80% of the men said working for a woman was all right, but the women's attitude towards other women as bosses had not changed at all: the majority of women still did not want to work for a woman boss!

THE IMPACT OF FEMALE VS. FEMALE COMPETITION

"Every woman senses that there is a price to pay for self-actualization. It engenders feelings of guilt in oneself while it stirs up feelings of envy, competition, and anger in other women" (Eichenbaum and Orbach, 1988, p. 90). There is a price to pay for competing. But there is also a high price to pay for not competing in a more direct, honest, and healthy manner. According to Keller and Moglen, "Competition denied in principle, but unavoidable in practice, surfaces in forms that may be far more wounding, and perhaps even fiercer and more destructive, than competition that is ideologically sanctioned" (1987, p. 508).

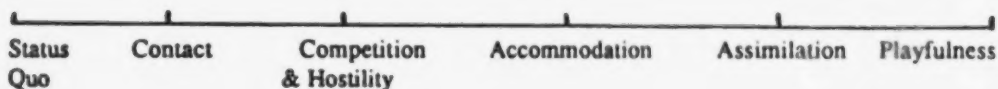
It is obvious that women, more than men, are responsible for the "glass ceiling" in the work place. On the personal front, there is tension between female friends: "the attachments to friends and partner seem at odds. The

friendship is experienced as a pull on the relationship and vice versa" (Eichenbaum and Orbach, 1988, p. 176). Because of the nature of female relationships, the merging that we require prevents discussion of difficult feelings that should occur between women; when women do discuss feelings, it is usually in the form of commiserating which results that "one is immobilized and complying with a view that doesn't feel accurate" (ibid, p. 166-7) and yet by conditioning feels powerless to change. This is closely related to our inability to support other women in their strengths: "So much of women's relating revolves around supporting one another through difficult times. When a woman seems to be doing well, however, support may be less forthcoming and she may feel that she has been cast out of the company of women" (ibid, p. 96-7).

For almost all women, there is a certain amount of disappointment as their own emotional needs go unmet: what we need and want, but find almost impossible, is to have satisfying friendships with other women, and satisfying couple relationships.

Madden identifies one major impact of women not supporting other women in their inability to get women elected: "they reject uniting with other women to secure enough power to bring these goals to fruition" (1987, p. 185). The ability to become a powerful force is definitely there if women would choose to unite: "women now not only outnumber men, but outvote them. In the last national election, American women cast 54.5 million votes compared to 47.4 million cast by men" (Riessman, 1986, p. 2). Women had the opportunity to show their power in the Ferraro candidacy. Instead, in the same way that women defeated the ERA, they "did not use her (Ferraro) as a symbol to send a message that the concerns of females were to be reckoned with" (Madden, 1987, p. 188).

The impact, then, might be summed up most dramatically by using a model of change (Meyer, 1988, p. 3):



Given the evidence above, the women's movement seems to be stuck at the competition and hostility stage of change. Still angry after all these years, women are still too often in separatist groups, forming coalitions that turn upon themselves and keep themselves down, still standing with their noses pressed to the windows, wishing they were on the inside.

MOVING BEYOND COMPETITION

Keller and Moglen suggest that "Denial delimits not the conflict but the possibilities of a creative solution to that conflict" (1987, p. 508). If women are to move beyond deadly female-female competition, they must first admit that it exists and thus move on to solutions, to try to move into the accommodation and assimilation stages of change.

It has been noted by many researchers that men focus on a product while women focus on the process. These distinct and unique ways of behaving might be described as two different cultural conditionings. Recognizing that men and women have different conditioning, one solution to move toward assimilation might be an intercultural technique known as developing a third culture. Men have already changed more than women have, as evidenced by Sutton and Moore's Harvard Business Review study and others about attitudes of men working for women bosses, and by Riessman's assertion that the emerging values of our whole society are "related to caring,

compassion, empathy, helping, and cooperation" (1986, p. 2), traditionally viewed as female values. Men have begun the steps toward focusing on process; women need to meet halfway and learn to also focus on product. This technique of developing a third culture involves taking the best of both--male and female--and identifying a new and more productive set of behaviors. And, it requires leaving behind the old, dysfunctional ways of behaving, such as women's passive and deadly competitive styles towards other women and viewing man as the enemy.

Lindenbaum, and to some degree Eichenbaum and Orbach, suggest that what women do to each other can better be described as envy, and that competition is different and more positive: "In competition, the envious wish to harm the Other is modified by displacing this aggression onto the task of developing the desired quality in the Self....in true competition, one is provided with the opportunity to become competent" (Lindenbaum, 1985, p. 100). In this definition of competition, if one improves, the other does not have to get worse. Competition promotes competence.

If women can get beyond this "image of limited good" view of the world, they then can practice and learn the style of collaboration: speaking up honestly and directly to other women about their feelings, then dropping those feelings and spending their remaining energy on identifying options and alternatives.

Women need to reassess their priorities, learning to be more task-oriented, and recognizing that the goal of everyone in a group loving everyone else might be futile and unattainable. Energy spent on that goal is admirable but probably wasted; women have to learn to work with women they don't nor probably never will love or even like. Sometimes the task (product) has to take precedence over the process (a warm and loving group).

Eichenbaum and Orbach, without labelling it as a third culture, agree that a new femininity is required:

Our traditional restricted social roles are enabling because they develop our capacity to connect and nurture, but they are also disabling because they restrain our autonomy and separateness. In the same dialectical fashion, the patriarchal context of the world women are now emerging into--the masculine world of competition and the repression of emotions--has its liberating aspects, because they encourage, even demand self development that will ultimately produce a new synthesis, a new femininity that is connected and caring as well as separate and defined. (1988, p. 200-1)

Madden suggests that women need role models: "positive role models...women who--on their own--have achieved some measure of corporate success....Be they physically attractive, personally objectionable, or even social hermits, these are designated for role model stature" (p.244-5). The words "on their own" are key to these role models: Katherine Graham and others who are commonly touted as successful women don't qualify for the kind of role models that women need: they didn't make it on their own. Jane Pauley removes herself as a role model, saying that she is not typical since she makes unusual amounts of money and can afford lots of help. Finding these role models is not difficult--lots of women have done it--but women first have to give up their expectations of connectedness: this kind of role model is seldom found in separatist groups!

As mentioned, women have to learn to be more direct. Madden suggests women should "form the habit of open communication, rather than party talk" (1987, p. 237). Johnson suggests that the usual discussion at feminist meetings is devastating: "in such an environment no rigorous thinking could possibly take place" (1987, p. 134) adding that competitive discussion is tyrannical. She suggests that equal time be made available to all participants, if they choose to use it. This researcher has labelled this technique as turn-taking, and

requires strong commitment on the part of leadership to keep the high-talkers from their usual taking over.

Johnson suggests that if women are going to learn to love themselves and each other, and be more productive and creative, "we are going to have to rid ourselves of our internalized oppression" (1987, p. 45). Keller and Moglen agree: "To pose cooperation as a given and competition as the problem in need of explanation (as the romance of women's culture does) is as unrealistic and as ideologically problematic as the more conventional, converse stance" (1987, p. 509). It appears, then, that the first step for women is to realize that women are their own oppressors, to quit feeling sorry for themselves, and to move forward from there.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

"Maintaining a cease-fire in the war now raging among women in America's offices will be about as simple as trying to keep the peace in the Middle East" (Madden, 1987, p.251). This paper has demonstrated that the war does indeed exist--and not only at the office--and has shown that there are four reasons why women compete, all results of cultural, or gender, conditioning: we compete to catch a man, to protect men, to protect our identity and escape abandonment, and over perceived scarce resources.

The impact of this deadly competition is profound: women have emerged as the real contributors to the "glass ceiling" in the marketplace, women defeated the ERA, women have failed to unite and be heard as voters, and women personally pay the price of tension in their friendships and significant relationships. The continued stance of women that "man is the enemy" has served to keep women's progress on the change theory continuum at the stage of competition and hostility, which is destructive to women and the culture.

To move towards accommodation and assimilation, it is suggested that men are already learning to be more like women, and now women need to learn some of the things that men do well. Women can learn to focus more on the product--be more task-oriented--in the same way that men are learning to be more process-oriented. This is the technique of building a third culture.

Women need to practice more collaboration: being open and direct in their communication, being task-oriented, and giving up their unrealistic goal of trying to love everyone. Women need to realize that sometimes the task goal--the product--of the group overrides the need for everyone to be in complete harmony and warm and loving.

Women need to identify realistic role models, other women who have achieved results on their own in the corporate world. To do that, women have to give up the idea that these role models must fit the romantic feminist notion of "connectedness."

Women need to implement the process of turn-taking, making sure that everyone in discussion and decision-making groups has equal time, whether or not she chooses to use it. This requires a change in commitment and therefore behavior, since it puts a time limit on discussion. This is also difficult to implement since most women think they already do this, when in reality it is very rare!

Implications of this qualitative study are rather exciting and practical: if there is any doubt left that women are doing each other in, further empirical research could be conducted to confirm or disprove that deadly competition. Useful "how-to's" can be developed and utilized for women's groups and individuals who are interested in change. And, acknowledgement of the existence of this competition has important implications for the development of policy issues such as child care and maternity leave. As

Madden pointed out, "Those who have no choice but to stay and fight (in the work place) are hurt by those who turn and walk away" (1987, p. 92). Call it envy or competition, the stage is set for another battle in the war between women.

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